ASTONISHING X-MEN®

#5

MARVEL

SOULE

ROSANAS

WOODARD

THE ASTRAL PLANE.

WHAT DO YOU MEAN, YOU *COULDN'T SAVE GAMBIT?*

EXACTLY THAT, ROGUE. OR, TO BE MORE ACCURATE...

...I *DIDN'T* SAVE GAMBIT.

INSTEAD, I SAVED ALL OF *YOU*.

BUT *WHY?* XAVIER, IF YOU THINK--

I *AM* THINKING, ANNA MARIE. THAT IS ALL I AM *DOING*.

AS WE SPEAK HERE...

"...I AM ENDURING THE SHADOW KING'S GLOATING ABOUT THE VICTORY HE BELIEVES IS HIS, NOW THAT HE HAS TAKEN BOTH GAMBIT AND LOGAN TO HIS SIDE OF THE BOARD."

ONE MORE TO ME, CHARLES! THE GAME'S RAPIDLY TURNING AGAINST YOU, OLD FRIEND!

AND YOUR POOR HAND. ARE YOU SURE THIS ISN'T ALL TOO *STRESSFUL* FOR YOU?

IT'S NOT OVER YET, FAROUK. MANY MOVES YET TO COME.

I AM MAINTAINING SECONDARY REALITIES FOR EACH OF YOU, SO THE SHADOW KING DOES NOT REALIZE YOU ARE HERE WITH ME.

"I AM ENGAGED IN A PSYCHIC BATTLE WITH LOGAN ON *MULTIPLE* LEVELS..."

"...AND OTHER THINGS BESIDES.

HELLO, FANTOMEX.

I WAS THINKING PERHAPS WE COULD TALK.

"MY SKILL, AND THE ASTRAL PLANE'S UNIQUE PROPERTIES, LET ME DO ALL OF THAT AT ONCE."

BUT IT TAKES ITS TOLL.

I HAD TO LET GAMBIT GO. LESS WEIGHT FOR ME TO CARRY, AND SOMETHING TO SPLIT THE SHADOW KING'S FOCUS, TO GIVE ME MORE ROOM TO MOVE.

BUT WHERE *IS* HE?

"HIS MIND IS TRAPPED HERE, ALONG WITH LOGAN'S.

"AND IN THE REAL WORLD, THEIR BODIES ARE THE SHADOW KING'S INSTRUMENTS. I CAN'T SAVE THEM. I CAN'T EVEN SAVE MYSELF."

THAT TASK FALLS TO *YOU*.

SURPRISE, SURPRISE.

ACT I

ASTONISHING X-MEN

LIFE OF X
PART FIVE

CHARLES XAVIER AND THE SHADOW KING ARE BATTLING FOR THE SOULS OF THE X-MEN ON THE REALITY-WARPING ASTRAL PLANE. THE SHADOW KING IS WINNING.

FIRST, THE PSYCHIC PARASITE TOOK LOGAN, AND USED HIM TO ATTACK PSYLOCKE, BISHOP, ANGEL AND A SQUAD OF BRITISH SPECIAL FORCES COMMANDOS SENT TO SUBDUE THE MUTANTS. LOGAN ESCAPED, AND HAS NOW BEGUN TO TRANSMIT A STRANGE MENTAL INFECTION TO THE TERRIFIED CITIZENS OF LONDON.

ON THE ASTRAL PLANE, FANTOMEX AND MYSTIQUE BUILT A REALITY FORTRESS TO DEFEND THEMSELVES FROM THE SHADOW KING'S ASSAULTS, AND USED IT TO ENJOY EVERY FANTASY THEY COULD IMAGINE--INCLUDING EACH OTHER.

ROGUE AND GAMBIT ALMOST MANAGED TO DO THE SAME.

IN A LAST DESPERATE EFFORT, XAVIER PULLED THE ASTRAL-PLANE-BOUND X-MEN INTO A SECRET SUBREALITY, WHICH HE INTENDS TO USE AS A STAGING GROUND FOR THE FINAL ASSAULT. ALL BUT GAMBIT.

GAMBIT...IS LOST.

THE SHADOW KING IS WINNING.

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LONDON.

LOOK AT HIS EYES--HE'S LIKE THE OTHER ONE. TAKE HIM OUT.

NO! GAMBIT'S NOT HIMSELF--HIS MIND IS POSSESSED. LET ME TRY TO HELP BEFORE YOU JUST SHOOT HIM!

APPRECIATE THE OFFER, PSYLOCKE.

BUT I CAN TAKE CARE OF MYSELF.

FIRE!

BRRK BRRK BRRK BRRK BRRK

NO, YOU IDIOTS! HE'S USED HIS POWERS--HE'S CHARGED THE ENTIRE ROOFTOP!

IT'S AN *ENERGY GRENADE!*

ENERGY GRENADE? THAT DOESN'T--

THOOM

HA!

POLICE

NNF!

CUT THE BLOODY ROPES!

TOO LATE.

TRY... NOT...TO *MOVE.*

BUT WHAT... WHAT ARE YOU *DOING?*

GETTING US... OUT OF...HARM'S WAY.

NEXT... ROOFTOP OVER. IN...OTHER WORDS...

SAVING YOUR LIVES.

OOF!

AND MANY THANKS FOR THAT, MA'AM, BUT YOU'RE STILL UNDER ARREST.

SHOW US YOUR HANDS!

WILL YOU ALL JUST--

--STOP?

SHKK

GOODBYE.

AAAAAAH!

BLAM

WHOA!

NO, NO.

YOU, MY FRIEND...

...SHOULD FOCUS ON *FLYING* THIS THING.

JUST CONSIDER ME A *VERY IMPORTANT PASSENGER.*

AND GET ME DOWN THERE.

IT'S GETTING BAD OUT THERE. WE SHOULD HURRY.

I DIED...

"...ONCE UPON A TIME."

BUT DEATH WAS NOT THE END.

WE'RE MUTANTS, XAVIER. IF WE KNOW *ANYTHING,* IT'S THAT.

IF WE'RE REALLY RUNNING OUT OF TIME, MAYBE YOU CAN SKIP THE PSEUDO-PROFUNDITY. JUST A THOUGHT.

YOU NEED TO UNDERSTAND THE *NARRATIVE,* RAVEN--OR NONE OF WHAT I ASK YOU TO DO NEXT WILL MAKE SENSE. PLEASE LISTEN.

I DIED, AN AGONIZING FALL INTO DARKNESS. AND THEN...

"...IT BECAME DARKER STILL."

WELCOME, CHARLES. YOU'VE BEEN MISSED.

FAROUK.

"THE SHADOW KING *COLLECTED* MY SPIRIT SOMEHOW, AND BROUGHT ME HERE, TO THE ASTRAL PLANE.

"WE ARE VERY OLD ENEMIES--I BESTED HIM, LONG AGO. HE HAS TAKEN EVERY OPPORTUNITY SINCE TO TORTURE ME AND THOSE I CARE FOR.

DO YOUR WORST.

ALWAYS, XAVIER. ALWAYS.

"OUR BATTLE BEGAN THE MOMENT I ARRIVED HERE--A PLACE WHERE EVERYTHING ONE IMAGINES CAN BECOME REAL.

"THE SHADOW KING AND I ARE PERHAPS THE TWO MOST POWERFUL PSYCHICS OUR PLANET HAS EVER PRODUCED.

"AS IT TURNED OUT...

WE DON'T KNOW EACH OTHER WELL, FANTOMEX, BUT I KNOW YOUR STORY. I CONSIDER YOU AN ALLY.

IF YOU'D EVER WANTED IT, I WOULD HAVE GLADLY WELCOMED YOU TO MY X-MEN.

NON, YOU DO NOT KNOW ME, *PROFESSEUR.* IF I DO GOOD, IT IS BECAUSE, IN THE END, IT IS GOOD FOR *ME.*

AH, YES. THE DELIGHTFUL IDENTITY THEY CODED INTO YOUR MIND WHEN THEY BUILT YOU AT WEAPON PLUS.

A THIEF WITH A HEART OF COAL.

NOT *JUST* A THIEF, *MON AMI!* A CRIMINAL THROUGH AND THROUGH. A *KILLER,* EVEN.

YES, YES, VERY FRIGHTENING. BUT LISTEN--BEFORE I DIED, I SPENT MUCH OF MY LIFE AS A *TEACHER.*

AND IF THERE IS ONE THING WE TEACHERS BELIEVE, IT IS THIS:

NO ONE ENDS WHERE THEY BEGIN.

"...WE COULD IMAGINE QUITE A BIT.

"WE FOUGHT ON EVERY POSSIBLE BATTLEFIELD, WITH EVERY POSSIBLE WEAPON.

"AT FIRST, WE WORKED WITH *EMOTION.*

"FAROUK WOULD HIT ME WITH THE MINDSCAPE OF A CHILD TOLD THEY WOULD NOT SEE ANOTHER WINTER.

"I WOULD COUNTER WITH THE JOY OF A WOMAN HOLDING HER INFANT AFTER BELIEVING SHE COULD NOT CONCEIVE.

"OR VICE VERSA. WE WERE NOT PARTICULAR. IT WAS ABOUT *POWER.*

ONWARD!

"WE TRIED EMOTIONS. WE TRIED MATHEMATICS, AND RAW ENERGY, AND PURE SENSATION. IN TIME, WE TURNED TO *STORY.*

"WE USED YOU...ALL OF *YOU*... AS OUR TOOLS. PIECES ON A CHESSBOARD. RAW MATERIAL FOR THE NARRATIVE OF OUR BATTLE.

"IT SEEMED FAMILIAR, EASY. A SHORTHAND WITH WHICH WE WERE BOTH COMFORTABLE. IF FAROUK AND I KNOW ONE THING--IT IS THE X-MEN.

"THE THINGS WE DID HERE... THE *STORIES* WE MADE...SAGAS AND SONGS AND AGES AND MASSACRES.

"RECENTLY, IT'S BEEN TIME TRAVEL, AND THEN A MUTANT-KILLING PLAGUE.

"EPICS, ONE AND ALL.

YOU THINK I HAVE NOT *TRIED* TO BE SOMETHING ELSE? SO MANY TIMES. BUT IT ALWAYS SNAPS BACK TO THE, *AH*...DEFAULT SETTING.

THE DEBONAIR, DEADLY THIEF. THE ROLE I WAS DESIGNED TO PLAY.

EVEN THIS SILLY *DETTE D'HONNEUR* WITH GAMBIT--I DO NOT TRULY CARE IF HE PAYS ME AT ALL. IT IS JUST A GAME TO ME--THE SORT OF THING THIEVES ARE SUPPOSED TO DO.

YOU KNOW WEAPON PLUS ALSO GAVE ME THE POWER OF ILLUSION, YES? TO AID ME IN MY MISSIONS.

I THINK OFTEN OF HOW FITTING THIS IS. EVERYTHING *ABOUT* ME IS AN ILLUSION.

I'M NOT EVEN FRENCH.

I HAVE HAD SO MANY STUDENTS JUST LIKE YOU, FANTOMEX, BELIEVING THEIR LIVES WERE FIXED, THAT THERE WAS NO POSSIBILITY OF CHANGE.

THEY ALL FOUND NEW PATHS. SO CAN YOU.

FINE, CHARLES. I'LL BITE. HOW?

IT WON'T BE EASY, OF COURSE. CHANGE IS HARD. BUT ON THE ASTRAL PLANE, A MOMENT CAN LAST A THOUSAND YEARS.

HERE, MY FRIEND...

"I DON'T KNOW HOW LONG WE FOUGHT. IT FELT LIKE A THOUSAND YEARS."

"BUT YOU DON'T FIGHT SOMEONE FOR THAT LONG WITHOUT COMING TO *UNDERSTAND* THEM."

I CAME TO KNOW THE SHADOW KING WELL ENOUGH TO CREATE A PLAN TO BEAT HIM.

ALL I NEEDED, WERE YOU, MY X-MEN. I CAN'T BEAT FAROUK ON MY OWN.

BUT ENOUGH TALK. I AM BARELY HOLDING ON.

TIME RUNS SHORT.

THIS LAST ONE WAS *LOVELY*, CHARLES. EXCELLENT WORK. *INCREDIBLY* ENGAGING--USING THE WOLVERINES THAT WAY WAS BRILLIANT.

THANK YOU.

...WE HAVE ALL THE TIME IN THE WORLD.

NOW WE MUST *FIGHT*, MY FRIENDS.

THINGS ARE ABOUT TO GET MUCH, MUCH WORSE.

LONDON.

YOU SEE ANYTHING, BISHOP?

NOTHING, ANGEL. YOU SURE THAT'S WHERE LOGAN WENT?

POSITIVE. RIGHT WHERE I THREW HIM.

OKAY. HE HASN'T COME OUT.

MEANS I GOTTA GO IN.

MAIS LA, BISHOP, WHAT IS THIS MESS?

GAMBIT... HOW ARE YOU *HERE?*

WHY, PSYLOCKE PULLED ME OUT. SAID THINGS WERE GETTIN' BAD BAD OUT HERE, SAID I COULD HELP.

YEAH. SHADOW KING POSSESSED LOGAN. HE'S *DOING* SOMETHING-- NOT SURE WHAT, BUT CAN'T BE GOOD.

WE NEED TO GET IN THERE. STOP HIM.

OH, I *KNOW* WHAT HE'S DOIN', ME.

SETTT...

HE DOIN' SOMETHIN' LIKE *THIS.*

...MEEEE...

POOR LUCAS. YOU COULDN'T SHIFT THE PSYCHIC ENERGY. YOU DIDN'T HAVE *TIME,* DID YOU?

NO ONE HAS ANY TIME. NOT ANYMORE.

...FREEEEE...

GET *OFF* HIM!

AM I SUPPOSED TO BE *AFRAID,* WARREN? WORD IS YOU'RE A *PACIFIST* THESE DAYS.

WHAT. ARE YOU GOING TO DO, FLAP YOUR WINGS *PARTICULARLY* HARD? MUSS MY HAIR?

WHOA!

COME ALONG, BISHOP.

"YOU HAVE SOME NEW FRIENDS TO MEET."

SETTT MEEE FREEEEE...

SETTT MEEE FREEEEE...

SETTT MEEE FREEEEE...

LOVELY.

SETTT MEEE FREEEEE...

SETTT MEEE FREEEEE...

SETTT MEEE FREEEEE...

THIS

SHOULD

BE

ENOUGH.

GO,

FRIENDS!

BE

FRUITFUL

AND

MULTIPLY!

SETTT...

...MEEEE...

...FREEEEE...

BETSY...WE'VE LOST *BISHOP*, AND SOMETHING...

...SOMETHING'S *HAPPENING.*

WHAT DO YOU *MEAN*, WARREN? CAN WE HELP?

I'M STILL TRYING TO UNDERSTAND WHAT I'M SEEING.

"IT'S SOME SORT OF *POSSESSION.*

"COMMUNICATED BY *TOUCH*, AND IT'S *SPREADING.*

"SPREADING *FAST.*

MINISTRY OF DEFENCE SUPERHUMAN CRISIS COMMAND CENTER.

DEAR GOD...WHAT *IS THIS*... THEY'RE *INFECTING* THEM...

ENOUGH IS ENOUGH. WE'RE LOSING CONTROL OF THE SITUATION.

PREPARE TO STERILIZE THE SITE.

THE *SITE?* COMMANDER KEENE, YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT A NOT INCONSIDERABLE PORTION OF LONDON. ARE YOU--

YES, SERGEANT, I AM SURE. A GROUP OF MUTANTS APPEARED IN OUR CITY AND INSTIGATED A METAHUMAN CRISIS EVENT.

WE HAVE FOLLOWED ALL PROTOCOLS LAID OUT IN OUR RULES OF ENGAGEMENT--REACHED OUT TO THE ACTORS, ATTEMPTED TO DEFUSE THE SITUATION... ALL OF IT.

A NUMBER OF OUR PEOPLE ARE NOW DEAD OR INJURED, AND AN UNCONTROLLED LEVEL 4 PSYCHIC CONTAGION APPEARS TO HAVE BEEN UNLEASHED.

IT WOULD BE BRUTALLY IRRESPONSIBLE TO SIT BACK AND HOPE THE MUTANTS WILL SOMEHOW PUT EVERYTHING RIGHT.

THEY HAVE POWER. THAT DOES NOT MAKE US THEIR *VICTIMS.*

ACTING NOW COULD SAVE THE WORLD, WAITING COULD DOOM US ALL. THIS IS NOT A CHOICE. IT IS MY DUTY.

CONTINUE PREPARATIONS TO STERILIZE.

ANGEL! THIS ALL STARTED BECAUSE THE SHADOW KING TOOK LOGAN AND GAMBIT. YOU HAVE TO ***STOP*** THEM. IT COULD END THIS.

*I KNOW, BETSY...BUT I DON'T SEE **HOW.***

WARREN...

...YES, YOU DO.

I ***CAN'T.*** I CAN'T LET HIM OUT. NOT EVEN FOR THIS. AFTER A FIGHT LIKE THAT...AFTER TASTING BLOOD...ARCHANGEL WOULD NEVER STOP.

HE'S AN APOCALYPSE SEED...I DON'T KNOW WHERE IT WOULD END.

I CAN HELP YOU. I'VE DONE IT BEFORE. WE CAN LOCK HIM AWAY AGAIN.

WE CAN DO IT TOGETHER. JUST LIKE...

JUST LIKE OLD TIMES. I KNOW.

ALL RIGHT, BETSY.

IF YOU'LL SAVE ME...

...I WILL SAVE THEM.

SSSkkkCkkk

TO BE CONTINUED...

HOUSE OF X

Over the past few months there's been some really BIG X-News…the kind of stuff that's made us have to go get one new thrill-o-meter after another.

We have Charles Xavier back in action over in ASTONISHING X-MEN (and let me tell you, issue #6 is going to have a surprise ending that not even a telepath would see coming). You've seen announcements regarding the return of the beloved-and-long-missed Jean Grey in December's PHOENIX RESURRECTION miniseries (heads up, big plans for her afterwards), and LEGACY #1 revealed a certain Canadian mutant is back in town with sharpened claws and those famously fuzzy sideburns (and not even tease-meister Mark is gonna say anything about that just yet).

I know those three monumental moments are hard to top…but believe me, the relentless residents of THE HOUSE OF X are hard at work on some incredibly cool plans and books for 2018. Trust me, True Believer, this is the kind of stuff that's gonna break the X-Men thrill-o-meter all over again.

Some hints:

X-MEN BLACK: Thrill-o-meter level V

X-COUPLES: Thrill-o-meter level IV

X-STUDENTS: Thrill-o-meter level M

X-PATIENT: Thrill-o-meter level VM

X-WEAPON X: Thrill-o-meter level X

X-MEN GOLD:

By Marc Guggenheim and Marc Laming. Kitty Pryde takes charge and leads a new team into a heroic age!
Issue #15!

X-MEN BLUE:

By Cullen Bunn and Jorge Molina. The time-displaced original five join their greatest enemy, Magneto. Evil mutants, you're toast!
Issue #15!

WEAPON X:

By Greg Pak, Marc Borstel and Ibraim Roberson. The Weapon X program is back, but this time they are building weapons of mutant destruction. Old Man Logan, Sabretooth and a team of stealthy killers take the bloody battle back to them.
Issue #11!

ALL-NEW WOLVERINE:

By Tom Taylor and Juann Cabal. A virus from another world threatens to wipe out mankind. Kicking off an epic tale that will take Laura Kinney to the stars.
Issue #27!

GENERATION X:

By Christina Strain and Eric Koda. Jubilee and a band of mutant misfits in the new Xavier Institute. What could go wrong? EVERYTHING!
Issue #8!

JEAN GREY:

By Dennis Hopeless and Victor Ibáñez. She's the leader of X-MEN BLUE, but what does she do in her spare time? What would you do if you had a premonition of the Phoenix Force returning?
Issue #9!

CABLE:

By Ed Brisson and Jon Malin. A new villain is traveling through time to assemble a doomsday weapon. Cable's most dangerous mission ever!
Issue #151!

ICEMAN:

By Sina Grace and Robert Gill. The coolest hero on the planet, Bobby Drake the elder, in super-hero solo adventures.
Issue #8!

OLD MAN LOGAN:

By Ed Brisson and Mike Deodato Jr. Who is the Scarlet Samurai?!
Issue #31!

ASTONISHING X-MEN:

By Charles Soule and a murderers' row of chart-topping and up-and-coming artists. Fan-favorite characters battle one of the X-Men's most dangerous foes!
Issue #6!

Make sure to let us know your thoughts. You can email us at officex@marvel.com (add "OKAY TO PRINT" in the subject line). And don't forget about #XMENMONDAY on Twitter, where I'll post some tidbit from one or more of the books and address your questions. I can't guarantee an answer for everybody, but I'll do my darndest!

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ZONE